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ABSTRACT

Society at present is a sophistic society, a rhetorically negotiated and mediated consensus reality. The 20th century has been a brilliant and bloody transition from "idealism" to the "sophistic." Perhaps the tools of the Sophistic--rhetorical tropes, social construction of meaning, a pragmatic linguistics of consensus making the weaker seem the stronger, possibility and not certainty or essence--are the tools of the nomad and webmaker. The new page captures other texts and builds lines to yet others that, in turn, make sense only because the first law is "only connect." To establish hyper-rhetoric, the scholar must first look at existing tools and fundamental principles. Hypertexts, whether storyspaces or internet sites, are, by virtue of how they are imagined, locations and occasions. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari postulate a science--or rhetoric--based on "nomos," not "logos." Nomos is a temporary encampment, a pasture or habitation, a space for writing, a link on a path to other links. The self too, is an event: an instant of connections, an assemblage of desire and social context. Hypertext clearly calls into question all idealist assumptions and calls for a rhetoric that can encompass its emerging texts. Whereas logocentric rhetorics found themselves on methods of assuring truth (dialectic, logical appeals) or at least credibility (ethical and emotional appeals), a hyper-rhetoric is interested more in speed and usefulness. (TB)

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Random Access Nomad Rhetorics

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Random Access Nomad Rhetorics

Welcome to The Third Sophistic. The society in which we live is indeed a sophistic society, a rhetorically negotiated and mediated consensus reality. Any available theory, research, or technology that gets the job done gets the prize. The choice of which job gets done is also socially mediated. We can't go searching for some ideal of Truth or Justice or Happiness without trampling on the lives and livelihoods of everybody else. The Platonic Ideal and the Republic, its home, have vanished, squeezed to death by contingency plans and special interests.

So, we are in the midst of an era defined by its nature as contingency plan, a bricolage of laws and rights and technologies and instant, ephemeral culture. Nietszche didn't declare God dead, he declared idealism dead and with it the State's authority to always unquestionably substitute itself for Truth or Justice. The 20th Century has been a brilliant and bloody transition from Idealism to this Third Sophistic. Perhaps the tools of Sophistic--rhetorical tropes,

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social construction of meaning, a pragmatic linguistics of consensus, making the weaker seem the stronger, possibility and not certainty or essence--are the tools of the nomad and webmaker. The new page captures other texts and builds lines to yet others that, in turn, make sense only because the first law is "Only connect." Every idea, every link is only as good as what you do with it, what you make of it, how it is set into variation. Looking up remote host.

I will argue that more than society, but the very self we compose to greet it, is a rhetorically mediated assemblage of contingencies, special interests, and connections (to others, to objects, to ideas, to machines, what have you). And this is nowhere more visible than in the various versions of hypertext writing. But even Gregory Ulmer complains in the recent Hyper/Text/Theory that such a "hyperrhetoric has yet to be invented" (348). If, indeed, we are ourselves rhetorically constructed and mediated, we have entered not the Third but the Nth Sophistic. And a rhetoric of this new era is desperately needed. And it is, by all definitions of the word, a hyper-rhetoric.

In order to begin to establish a hyper-rhetoric, we can look for existing tools and fundamental principles. First, hypertexts, whether Storyspaces or internet sites, are, by virtue of how we imagine them, locations and occasions: "looking up remote host." Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in Capitalism and Schizophrenia' postulate a science--and I would extend that to a rhetoric--based on nomos, not logos. Nomos, as Susan Jarratt says, has its origins in Greek poet Pindar, as

pasture and *habitation* . Gregory Poulakos describes it a something to be passed through, a temporary encampment. A space for writing, a link on a path to other links. So this view of communication as location and occasion, so essential to the Sophists, is where we can begin. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the rhetor is a nomad, passing from connection to connection on a "line of flight" that is neither from somewhere nor to somewhere(TP see especially the chapters "Rhizome" and "587 B.C.-A.D. 50: On Several Regimes of Signs"). The nomad exists in these connections, indeed is composed of these connections, as a transitory location. An assemblage and a multiplicity. This is Nietzsche's project: the self as multiple, an assembled text. Deleuze and Guattari, then, pre-suppose that, as multiplicities, we're rhetorically constructed, but it is a rhizomic and nomadic rhetoric. They say, "The rhizome [think crabgrass] operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots...and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight"(TP 21). The contrast to the methods of Idealist rhetorics--logos, ethos, and pathos (in that order)--should be apparent.

So the self, too, is an event: an instant of connections, an assemblage of desire and the social context. The continuing sense of self--"who I was then and what I'm gonna be when I grow up"--are always in the context of an instant: causes and effects, alliances and wars, desires and repressions. There is no self to be abstracted from a moment, and so there is no individuation of a self *a la* Jung. That would literally be taking the fish out of the water to study it. Perhaps enlightening, but certainly not a complete or vital understanding of a

being that only exists in a social and historical context. So Deleuze and Guattari propose an individuation of an event--their term is haecceity--in which the lines of desire that intersect this second, in this body, in this context are realized, allowed to flow and cross and turn back, followed. The self, the rhetor, is only part of this moment.

Thus, the central tenet of Sophistic rhetorics, *kairos* or attention to the appropriate moment, by concentrating on the the momentary intersection of multiple desires leads the rhetor both outside to what is to be known, and back inward to that which is speaking. Thus, as desires are mediated in us, we are mediated by rhetoric.

And as with electrons, we can can know location but not speed or direction of flight. We see this all the time in webpages: "this is my name and location, this a bit of State info about me, and here's some of my work, and here are a few of my favorite websites." For example, I'm writing this in the office next to J. Paul Johnson. I go to his webpage, pass through his film course syllaweb to a clip of Death playing chess in Bergman's Seventh Seal. I could just as easily be admiring photos of his daughter. Paul as haecceity: Little Maddie playing chess with Death or maybe splashing in the gentle Bergmanian North Sea waves rolling in from the deep background. Where to? What next?

Hypertext clearly calls into question all idealist assumptions and calls for a rhetoric that can encompass its emerging texts. Whereas logocentric rhetorics found themselves on methods of assuring Truth

(dialectic, logical appeals) or at least credibility (ethical and emotional appeals, a hyper-rhetoric is interested more in speed and usefulness. It is a shift in view from the inside of a text to the outside. Less a concern for what a text "says" and more for what a text does, what thinking it makes possible, what connections it allows us. Deleuze and Guattari describe this outside of the text as an assemblage: "a multiplicity that neccessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections. There are not points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines" (TP 8). Lines of flight without origin or destination, composed solely of desire made manifest as electrons on a screen. The chief point of difference is that an assemblage has no points of origin or destination, no specific message to "get." Instead it is a state of in-betweenness. A rhizomic text will "know how to move between things, establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings" (TP 25). In a hyper-rhetoric, this would entail a text that is an assemblage only when the reader/spectator/linker ties into it. The meaning then, no longer resides in the site, the text, but in between, in the assemblage of text and reader, which immediately changes the nature of both prior entities because they are now assembled uniquely. They say:

> unlike trees or their roots the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature. . . .It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither a beginning nor an end, but always a middle from which it

> grows and which it overspills. . . .The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. (TP 21)

And hypertexts, at least some of them, have similar character and methods: Capture (downloading), offshoots (hot links), conquest (inhabitating a server or site), variation (the multiple paths and links possible), expansion (note the way websites tend to always grow larger and take more memory to access). A rhizome/nomad text is never an image of the world (or even of one being in it) but rather deterritorializes the world, sets it into variation until it is pinned down and reassembled as another instant. If a book even proposes to "present the world," it at the same time makes the world into what it expressly is not (language) and then adds to the world this expressly Other creation, changing (at least a little, maybe) the world itself by allowing the this new thing that at once provides a new way of looking and a new thing to see (TP 11).

A new rhetoric brings with it a new system of value. If texts can no longer be judged (solely?) on their approximation to Truth or Reality or the proper methods of attaining these ideals, then what are we looking for? Deleuze and Guattari would recommend usefulness, surprise, elegance of assemblage, versatility of purpose and method, the number of ideas/people/texts/social assemblages a text puts into play, interdisciplinarity, joy. Deleuze says, "The process of desire is called 'joy,' not lack or demand." (Deleuze and Parnet 100). A nomad text intends to remain--as long as possible--outside of the State, in the flux of the in-between, opposed to control and limit. "Writing carries out the conjunction, the transmutation of fluxes, through

which life escapes from the resentment of persons, societies, and reigns" (Deleuze and Parnet 50). Writing itself has a character that is opposed to the fixity of State agendas: "Writing always combines with something else, which is its becoming" (Deleuze and Parnet 44). Combination, flux, becoming, becoming-other, writing gathers dimensions, speeds, and trajectories overflowing the in-between, the outside of the State. Thus the economics of a nomadic rhetoric will also remain outside State values. The deconstruction of copyright the United States is currently wrangling with is a key peice of evidence, here, and is a problem unlikely to disappear without a greater exertion of State authority on a process that resists law.

So, *nomos*, not *logos*. *Kairos*, not *eidos*. Joy, not Truth. Becoming, not Being. A hyperrhetoric is emerging. But we need to see it in performance.

There are a few common types of hypertext: the deep page (an essay, e.g., with its sources and allusions as if on a page under the page we read), a closed storyspace document (we follow the paths of a narrative or a text web at will, but the selections and directions are limited or moderated), a read/write hypertext (like Mark Metzler's poetry collection", in which it is possible to infinitely modify the text as well as follow its current paths and links), and a web page that links to others which link to others in a potentially limitless line of flight. Each of these has a different rhetorical trope and philosophy--even an ethos--underlying it. Host contacted: 64% of 34K read.

The deep page is still very much bound by logocentrism. Its model, the archetype of logocentrism in academia, the research paper. The documentation--as thorough as you wanna be: whole texts, explanatory notes, etc.--is still a bifurcation that underlines, and yet makes astonishingly visible, what Deleuze and Guattari call "the root-book." They say, "The book imitiates the world as art imitates nature: by procedures specific to it that accomplish what nature can no longer do. The law of the book is the law of reflection, the One that becomes two....[W]henever we encounter this formula...what we have before us is the most classical and well relfected, oldest and weariest kind of thought" (TP 5). And this hypertext even defies the trust readers have always offered authors: "if you say source X says this, then that's okay by me, at least until I find out different." Now, seeing the original is believing. If we are not already doing it, this is the kind of hypertext we will first encounter as comp teachers. How better, after all, to check documentation and prevent plagiarism?

Obviously this kind of hypertext is part of the State apparatus, and what else do we get paid for? They say, "The law of the State is not the law of All or Nothing (State societies *or* counter-State societies) but that of interior and exterior. The State is sovereignty. But sovereignty only reigns over what it is capable of internalizing, of appropriating locally" (TP 360). The State grows by hegemony and we are just some of the agents, the petty bureaucrats of hegemony. A new technology will not change our lives unless we configure it--or our lives--to do so. As Deleuze and Guattari remind us: "The State does not give power (*pouvoir*) to the intellectuals or conceptual

innovators; on the contrary, it makes them a strictly dependent organ with an autonomy that is only imagined yet is sufficient to divest those whose job it becomes simply to reproduce or implement all of their power (*puissance*)" (TP 368).

The ethos of teaching the deep page must reside, therefore, in the author-function: as either a reflector/reproducer of disciplinary power or as an unabashed assemblage of voices, authorities, connections, and lines of flight. As we reproduce disciplinary power roles, we reflect and re-ground State authority in yet another new medium, "internalizing and appropriating locally." The deep page as assemblage offers a text as multiplicity of voices, albeit in a closed and perhaps centered text. Nevertheless, this offers the possibility of better reproducing the rhetorically constructed assemblage that is the writer, the village of the mind.

The Closed Hypertext is a bit more revolutionary in that it implies, but does not produce, a rhizomatic text. I'm thinking here of Michael Joyce's and Stuart Moulthorp's hyper-fictions and Landow's Victorian Literature project. We are able to enter at any point and follow whatever lines we choose. However, the lines of flight are already mapped, closed off. An origin and a destination. This is a unique format for what many of us do with scholarly tomes already: read the index first and hop around for what interests us, backing up when confused, leaping ahead when bored. The implications in this sort of text are provocative, but, as J. Paul Johnson points out in his recent paper "Hyper/Text/Reading in the Late Age of Print," the

assumptions about readers--empowered hypersubjects taking control of the text--well, don't yet produce the sort of reader hypertexts seem to be requiring.

The Read-Write Hypertext, like Mark Metzler's collection of poetry, Reading the Map, offers many more revolutionary possibilities. In this hypertext, his Master's thesis at Winona State University, Metzler has written poems, linked them (*a la* the deep page) to his notes and to other poems. Several others have added their own notes, poems, and links. Metzler has enjoined readers to be participants in his textual event, even encouraging them to change his words and lines if they feel so compelled.

As Metzler's thesis advisor, I worked closely with him in both editing the manuscript and exploring its possibilities. When we first discussed this project, the implications--for authorship, copyright, the definition of reading and of writing--would pour down on us and pile up like the endless Minnesota winter. First, Metzler had to, happily, abandon the notion of being sole author of his own poems. As his thesis advisor, I could come in and change a line in the "original" that he had been refusing to change for months. And someone else could change my change. The poem would eventually begin to move: not to migrate as if to some destination, but to move on its own away from Metzler, from me, from any and all subsequent author-readers.

This, in turn, brings up the question of the collection's State status as a Master's thesis produced by a single writer. Is the book Metzler's or mine or yours? Does this ambiguity disqualify it in the academy? What does this say, then, about academic texts--especially since all of them are to one degree or other composed of other texts? Which multiplicity can we sanction? Does my "improvement" of Mark's poem effect its status as copyrightable/copyrighted? What does copyright mean to a text that exists to be so exploited, enlarged, destroyed? Off to Barthes and Foucault! Conjunction Junction, what's the author-function? In "Art and the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin tells us the difference between author and reader, artist and consumer/completer, becomes simply one of function. And here those functions blur so completely as to be nearly irrelevant. The Birth of the (W)Reader coasting in on a clamshell to declare that all texts belong to everyone all the time.

AHA! The collapse of capitalism from within through deconstruction and deterritorialization of copyright! The nomads are dancing around their fires just beyond the city walls!

Okay, but nobody quit your day job yet.

The webpage is another radical writing space, though perhaps more in theory at this point than practice. Ten years from now, we'll all be grading them in comp classes and begin to wonder how this all came about, like some poor Gorgias whose student one day hands him a piece of paper, a draft of a speech, "Tell me what you think," and he

suddenly realizes he's been displaced, replaced by a mere technology, stolen by Plato (at least to read Jasper Neel's account of Plato and writing). The webpage, take Paul's for example, is text that is in part deep page--"Click here for my resume," "Click here for a photo of my daughter"--and a radical rhetorical departure. Looking up remote host. From here, I can go to a micro-record company's page, and from there to a musician's page, an e-zine, or e-mail any of the above, including, especially, Paul. He is a nomos, a place to pass through, following any of the lines of flight he has assembled as a rhetorical construction of himself. He is becoming text, becoming electrons, becoming an assembled multiplicity, and there he is, in the next office, looking like any of us. Host contacted: 89% of 64K at 12 K/sec.

Deleuze says, "The minimum real unit is not the word, the idea, the concepts or the signifier, but the assemblage. It is always an assemblage that produces utterances....One must...speak <u>with</u>, write <u>with</u>. With the world, with a part of the world, with people. Not a talk at all, but a conspiracy, a collision of love or hatred" (Deleuze and Parnet 51-2). The keyword of rhizomic, nomadic rhetoric is AND, not IS (55). He says, "You should not find whether an idea is just or correct. You should look for a completely different idea, elsewhere, in another area, so that something passes between the two which is neither in one or the other" (10). In this "something between" we ride a line of flight, transformed, a visible process of becoming something new, neither self nor other. As we follow this collaboration of connections, we participate in being between, a process of infinite

becomings-Other. Following trails into dead-ends, backing up and leaping out again. All the while becoming-text. Deleuze and Guattari propose a rhetoric that composes us by making desire visible. Press the "Go" command on Netscape and witness your becomings, and your becoming-desire. Welcome to the Nth Sophistic. Document: Done.

Works cited

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[1] Capitalism and Schophrenia is a two-volume collaborative work. The two volumes are Anti-Oedipus and A Thousand Plaeaus. I will abbreviate the in citations as follows: AO for Anti-Oedipus and TP for A Thousand Plateaus.

[2] Reading the Map. This collection has recently been pulled from the Winona State University homepages because it contains previously copyrighted material. Prior to this it existed as a closed hypertext, though this is not the nature of the original text. The project, described below, was intended to be a public document that could be infinitely altered by any who access it.